

Dr. Briggs Discusses Global Public Health and International Travel (4:59 minutes)

Time Stamp 00:00:00: I think the role of culture is often overlooked by people when they think about what they want to do with public health, and for me, traveling, I've really learned a lot about how culture feeds into global public health. For example, in trips that I've made to the Middle East, I have come to realize that it's not polite, or it's not possible, for a woman to shake the hand of a man. I think that in going to other countries that are extremely conservative, it's very important for women especially to think about what clothes they're going to wear and how they're going to act. And I think it's also very important to think about when we develop educational programs that look fantastic to us, regarding how you improve awareness, you have to think about how that's going to be perceived by the country, by the people that you're making it for. For example, we had some anti-rabies educational material. And we were preparing it for China. We developed the program, and then we did a test pilot program showing to some people in China, and it absolutely did not work because they didn't relate to what we had put in there as various symbols. So we had to go back and change our symbols — not change the message, but actually change the way it's presented. I think those are important things when it comes to understanding the culture of the country that you're going to be working in.

Time Stamp 00:01:37: Before I travel anywhere, I start doing some homework. Certainly, I start looking at the country to see what's what in their culture. I look to find a representative there that I know that is involved in my field, which is rabies, to see what I should be presenting, what I should be aware of, and how I can prepare myself so that I am most effective when I get there because normally you don't stay for very long. So you need to be as effective as possible.

Time Stamp 00:02:11: Looking at global public health, we know that there are many different languages out there, and we certainly can't speak all of them. That's pretty clear. It would be nice if people learned a different language if they were going to go into public health. That's not always possible. The fact is that if you have an effective interpreter, you're going to be fine. English is the global language. And I think that that's understood. So in my travels, I've always had somebody who can interpret. And if somebody was going to work for example for the World Health Organization, or the World Association for the — sorry — if somebody was going to work for the World Health Association, or the World Animal Health Association, which are both based in France, then they should consider learning French.

Time Stamp 00:03:05: I have actually had a lot of travels related to global public health, and my specialty is rabies, so most of the time, rabies is endemic in resource-poor countries. So I travel to countries that are usually not very, you know, tourist destinations, but I've had some very wonderful experiences, and what I have learned in some of my experiences is that if you engage the community, they are more than willing to improve their own situation. I'll give you a couple of examples of some of the fantastic programs that I've visited recently. Bohol, Philippines, is a province in the Philippines. And in 2006, they were among the fourth highest provinces in the Philippines for rabies deaths, and most of those deaths were occurring in children. So we started a program with the governor of Bohol, and with various people throughout the island, and in three years, we've eliminated rabies. And we've done it by empowering the community and by letting them have the information they need and the tools they need to get the job done. It's just a fantastic success story.

The other story is one that's on-going and just started about a year ago. That's an Adopt-a-Village Program in India. And in that program, we educated children — we educated women who are involved in mother and children's health. We gave them the information about how to prevent rabies. To go there and see these women who are so proud of what they're doing, to save the lives of their fellow citizens in their villages, is really inspiring.